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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000644

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO A/S BRIMMER  
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY  
DRL/NESA FOR WHITMAN  
OVP FOR HMUSTAFA  
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER  
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT  
DOD/OSD FOR FLOURNOY/KAHL/DALTON  
PARIS FOR WALLER

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI SAYS HE'LL BE PRIME MINISTER,  
FOCUSES ON MILITARY ASSISTANCE

REF: BEIRUT 634

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) March 14 coalition and Future party leader Saad Hariri told visiting Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood and the Ambassador on June 8 that he would be Lebanon's next Prime Minister following March 14's victory in the June 7 parliamentary elections (reftel). One of his priorities as Prime Minister would be to seek more assistance for the Lebanese army, including attack helicopters, to strengthen the state and counter Hizballah. He also encouraged increased U.S. assistance to the Internal Security Forces (ISF -- police). Hariri expected cabinet formation to take no more than two weeks once the new parliament assumed office on June 21, and ruled out the possibility of a blocking third for the opposition. Hariri, effusively praising the President's June 4 speech in Cairo, also expressed a desire to travel to the United States soon. End summary.

PRIME MINISTER HARIRI

2. (C) A visibly tired but triumphant Saad Hariri met with visiting Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood and the Ambassador on June 8, just hours after delivering a victory speech to future supporters following preliminary predictions of a 71-57 victory for March 14 in the June 7 parliamentary elections. Mrs. Kathleen LaHood, Chief of Staff Joan DeBoer, Kevin Chapman, and Embassy INL Director and Pol/Econ Chief also attended the meeting, while Hariri was accompanied by his cousin and advisor Nader Hariri and Washington representative Amal Mudallali.

3. (C) Hariri declared that he would be Prime Minister in the next government, noting that March 14 had won 71 "pure March 14" seats out of 128, 35 of which were for his Future bloc. He expected the process of cabinet formation to take no more than two weeks. (Note: The process does not officially begin until the new parliament convenes on June 21 and elects

a new Speaker, whom we expect will remain Nabih Berri. End note.) Hariri said he had agreed with Berri in a telephone conversation earlier in the day that they would not talk about the blocking third, adding that "we will find something everyone is comfortable with."

¶4. (C) Hariri said the elections were all about Lebanon's sovereignty and independence, and demonstrated a rejection of the violence of May 7, 2008 and Hizballah's 2006 war with Israel. Had the Hizballah/Aoun alliance won the elections, Hizballah, would have put its hands on the entire country, starting with the army, turning Lebanon into an "Iran on the Mediterranean." Hariri reported that he already had made congratulatory calls to Berri and Hizballah, and planned to call Aoun later the same day.

¶5. (C) Cynically thanking Iranian President Ahmajinedad and Hizballah for their harsh rhetoric in recent weeks (including Hizballah SYG Nasrallah's declaration that May 7 was a "glorious day"), Hariri deemed the results a "big loss for Iran." Mudallali added that it was also, as Berri himself had said, a referendum on the "resistance." The opposition made so many mistakes; Hariri wondered aloud whether it had done so on purpose. Aoun was also a big loser, Hariri said, with the defeat of two of his key candidates, Vice Prime Minister Abu Jamra and Telecom Minister Gebran Bassil. Furthermore, in the areas where Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement did prevail, it did so with much smaller margins of victory than in the 2005 elections. Hariri also warned that Aoun's Armenian Tashnaq allies were becoming increasingly pro-Iranian.

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FIRST PRIORITY:  
MORE ASSISTANCE FOR  
SECURITY SERVICES,  
INCLUDING APACHES  
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¶6. (C) Throughout the meeting Hariri reiterated that his top priority as Prime Minister would be to seek more assistance for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Internal Security Forces (ISF). "We need a Marshall Plan for the LAF and ISF," he said, stressing to Secretary LaHood that this should include attack helicopters. The only way to fight Hizballah was through a strong central government; Lebanon now had a professional army, but lacked essential equipment and training, he said, adding that this took time and he needed to request it from France, Russia or anywhere he could -- although he clarified that he was not seeking to promote competition between donor countries.

¶7. (C) Hariri acknowledged that the United States had provided significant assistance on both accounts, and agreed with the Ambassador that Vice President Biden's May 22 event highlighting the delivery of Caravan aircraft, M60 tanks, Raven UAVs and other equipment being provided by the United States to Lebanon was a good step forward. Hariri also expressed his own hopes to travel to Washington soon to meet with senior leaders.

HIGH PRAISE FOR  
PRESIDENT'S SPEECH  
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¶8. (C) Hariri praised President Obama's June 4 speech in Cairo effusively, adding that the President had earned a great deal of good will in the region. He was especially impressed that the President had begun to tackle the Israeli-Palestinian issue so early on in his Administration. Secretary LaHood said President Obama had asked him to come to Lebanon to observe the elections and help solidify the relationship between the two countries. He reiterated that the President wanted Lebanon to be a part of a comprehensive Middle East peace. Hariri agreed, adding that Israel could no longer cite Hizballah as an obstacle.

19. (U) Secretary LaHood has cleared this cable.  
SISON